



PHOTO COURTESY OF JONESBORO POLICE DEPARTMENT

An EF-3 tornado tore through Jonesboro on March 28, 2020, destroying many homes and businesses. The storm went right through The Mall at Turtle Creek. Demolition on the building began on March 15, nearly a year after the tornado.

## A-State Theatre professor helps bring dance back to campus

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

An Arkansas State University professor made it possible for the Theatre Department to bring back dance classes and add a musical theatre emphasis.

Brianna Larson, assistant professor of theatre and dance, joined the A-State faculty as an instructor in 2017. Before then, the school lacked the classes needed to offer a musical theatre emphasis.

"Some of the interim professors or temporary instructors that have come through here have offered a class or two," Larson said. "But there had been a hiatus for a while, so bringing me in then allowed us to have dance again."

Now Larson teaches musical theatre, jazz, tap and social dance, but she got an untraditional start in the dance world through her mother.

"My mother teaches international folk dance, and she had an adult group and then she started a children's group when I was about 6 years old," Larson said. "So I started dancing with the group, and we originally did Scottish country dance and Israeli. As we got older, we added more and more countries."

As she grew older, Larson began learning different styles of dance. Because she had not learned traditional technique as a child, she latched on to Bob Fosse's choreography and considers him an inspiration. Fosse did not conform to the technique considered to be mainstream in his time.

"I discovered that he also didn't follow the traditional technique," Larson said. "I saw that you can do this and you can be great at it even if you don't fit the perfect mold."

She began teaching as a teenager and went on to study theatre and dance at Minnesota State University. While working



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on her senior thesis, which was a dance concert that highlighted her journey as a choreographer, she decided to continue teaching.

Not everyone who auditioned for her concert was already a dancer, so she led them through learning technical vocabulary in their bodies.

"Some of those moments throughout that process with my peers were so exciting," Larson said. "I was like 'oh my gosh I want to keep teaching and seeing that joy in people.' So I immediately started thinking about grad school."

Larson got her Master of Fine Arts in theatre pedagogy with a focus in movement and musical theatre.

She chose to come to A-State after her on-site interview. She said the community felt like home almost immediately. "During my time on campus, it didn't feel cold at all," Larson said. "I just immediately felt at home and comfortable. The faculty were welcome and warm. We talked about Harry Potter and other fun things."

Jeff McLaughlin, assistant professor of theatre, has worked with Larson for almost four years. He said she is an asset to their team.

"Well she brings a lot to

the table," McLaughlin said. "She's got a lot of experience and a lot of specialties. We're all sort of multi-faceted individuals, and she brings a lot of different skill-sets."

Larson also said she loved the drive the theatre students had for dance.

"When I had my meeting with the students, they were just so hungry for it," Larson said. "They were so excited to just dive in and they wanted to play and explore anything and everything."

Caelon Colbert, a senior theatre major from Little Rock, has taken several of Larson's classes and worked on A-State Theatre productions with her.

"I like Brianna as a teacher because she always elevates her students," he said. "She's never degrading when she's teaching. She's always accepting of what you bring to class the first day, and she's willing to work with anyone no matter what their skill level is."

Larson and the rest of the theatre faculty work to make their students feel like more than a student ID number.

"Theatre and dance are hard worlds, and if it's not the only thing that brings you joy, it's going to be even harder," Larson said.

## A-State community sees progress one year after tornado

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

Just as the world was learning to navigate through a pandemic, an EF-3 tornado tore through Jonesboro on March 28, 2020. A year later, the town has made progress in rebuilding, but the scars still show.

Along with many businesses that suffered losses in the storm, several members of the A-State community experienced damages. Dr. Edward Salo, associate director of heritage studies, and his wife, Jennifer, the competitive fellowships and scholarships coordinator, lost their home.

One year ago, the Salo family was devastated by the loss of irreplaceable valuables. The aftermath of the tornado brought them some unexpected positive changes.

"When we were living in a rental house, we decided we really liked living closer to downtown," Salo said. "We would take walks and see what was coming on the market, and we found a house we really liked. We didn't really want to wait around a whole year for the house to be rebuilt. Our son is a junior in high school, so we wanted him to be settled in."

The Salos sold their house back to the original builders who are now rebuilding

it on the same lot like many in their old neighborhood.

"We still drive by every now and then just to see how it is, and it looks like the vast majority of them have been rebuilt or fixed," Salo said. "There's still a lot of construction in the neighborhood, but it's coming along really well."

Dr. Manu Bhandari, associate professor of strategic communications, lost his home and car to the storm. He sold his house and moved as well.

Rebuilding around town has made progress as well. Businesses such as Ulta Beauty, PetSmart and Dillard's have already reopened. Others like Magic Touch Dry Cleaners and Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen are still working on rebuilding. The demolition of The Mall at Turtle Creek began on March 15 with no plans to rebuild.

Throughout the process, both Salo and Bhandari received assistance and support from A-State.

"A-State and community members have been very helpful," Bhandari said. "Soon after the disaster, the A-State Faculty Association very kindly provided some financial help, and Provost Alan Utter also graciously reached out to offer supportive messages."

Before they found their new home, the Salos lived in a rental house owned by a col-

league. He said everyone in the A-State community was helpful throughout the experience.

"All the different kinds of support were really helpful," Salo said. "The dean, chancellor and others all reached out offering any help we needed."

This spring Jonesboro has experienced a few rounds of severe storms as well. Salo said they had people reach out to check on them again because they knew it would be hard on them. Just like a year ago, when he stated he was just glad the storm had not taken any lives, Bhandari continues to focus on the positives.

"I still have a little more anxiety when we are expecting severe weather," he said. "But the support of everyone and some healing exercises have also helped make things better."

For those who suffered losses, the tornado brought valuable lessons and outlook changes.

"People were out helping us in a pandemic, just doing everything that they could," Salo said. "We decided we were going to do as much as we could to help people in any way."

Bhandari said he is healing from the experience.

"The whole thing shows how unpredictable our life is," he said. "We really don't know what day will be our last!"

## CAMPUS CRIME

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

March 20 | 7:12 p.m.

Officers were dispatched to a rollover accident at Marion Berry Parkway and Red Wolf Trail. Jonesboro Police were already on the scene, and the driver, Daniel Sykes, told them he did not know if there was another person in the vehicle. There was no evidence of another person involved in the accident.

Sykes refused to cooperate with EMS personnel, and he was placed in handcuffs. As an officer searched him, he could smell intoxicants on his breath.

An investigation found that the vehicle was traveling at a high rate of speed when it hit a curb multiple times, jumped it, collided with a light pole and completely broke it at its base. It then hit a tree and rolled over while continuing to travel downhill.

A half-empty bottle of Bombay Gin and an empty Seagram's Strawberry Daiquiri can were found in the vehicle.

March 24 | 11:38 p.m.

University Police conducted a traffic stop on a black Ford Focus because it did not have tail lights. The driver, Antwaine

Chandler, and the other two individuals in the vehicle all told the officer they did not have driver's licenses. The vehicle actually belonged to Shakayla Davis, who was one of the passengers. She was yelling at the officer the whole time he was speaking to Chandler, so he told her if she continued her attitude would only make things worse.

Davis provided a valid bill of sale for the vehicle but no proof of insurance. The officer made the decision to tow the vehicle, and Davis began cursing at him. She argued about giving him the keys, yelled that she had 30 days to get insurance on the vehicle after its purchase and slammed the trunk. She then walked away and continued yelling, and she was detained for disorderly conduct. She was given a citation and a court date of April 14.

March 25 | 8:26 a.m.

University Police received a call that there was a fire alarm going off in Kays Hall but it had not come through their dispatch system. The fire panel indicated an issue on the fourth floor on the women's side of the building. The Jonesboro Fire Department arrived and checked the floor, but there was no sign of a problem. Then, the alarm would not reset, so the lights continued

to flash. The scene was cleared and Facilities Management staff fixed the alarm.

March 28 | 5:41 p.m.

University Police conducted a search on Nathaniel Freeman following a traffic stop. They found a bag containing marijuana on him, so he was taken into custody on misdemeanor drug charges. An officer then called Freeman's girlfriend to alert her of the incident and ask if she could come take possession of his puppy. She arrived and took the puppy home.

March 28 | 7:19 p.m.

An officer saw Bradley Miller traveling northbound in a southbound lane at the intersection of Dean Street and Johnson Avenue and initiated a traffic stop. He identified himself to Miller and told him the reason for the stop. Miller then became argumentative and told the officer "other students do the same thing." He refused to provide his driver's license but finally gave it to the officer after he was told he would be placed under arrest for obstruction.

Miller was issued a citation for careless prohibited driving and given a court date of Oct. 6. He was given a University Referral for failure to comply as well.